

My name is Mary Pitcher. I live in Benzie County where I serve as County Commissioner, a position I have held for 13 years. I work in Manistee County, where I am employed by the Alliance for Economic Success. The Alliance is a nonprofit economic development organization working to bring jobs to Manistee County.

We feel extraordinarily fortunate to have Manistee State Park, providing outdoor recreation opportunities for our residents and visitors. The Alliance is continually working to improve the quality of life for Manistee County, as a means to attract new business and industry. Our State park contributes considerably to the quality of life in our region.

Tourism and outdoor recreation drive northern Michigan's economy. A healthy park system is essential to outdoor recreation and thus a healthy park system is essential to our livelihoods in northern Michigan.

As representative of local government, I can tell you that we have no funds for park development. And funds sorely needed. Benzie County looks forward to the possibility of applying for development funds for local parks, that would be made possible through this legislation. Our parks and recreation plan has recently been amended with a plan to extend the Betsie Valley trail with a segment that would connect Thompsonville and Traverse City.

Our State parks are a treasure that we have an obligation to maintain for today's residents and visitors and for future generations.

The funding this legislation would provide is essential for the future of our park system and for our economy. Thank you.